

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 /026 W
-----171330Z 078048 /40
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FM AMEMBASSY PRAGUE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2103

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 PRAGUE 0447

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, SOPN,CZ, SHUM
SUBJECT: FOREIGN MINISTER REJECTS EMBASSY PROTEST OVER HOFFMAN
DETENTION

REF: PRAGUE 0421

1. SUMMARY: ACTING FOREIGN MINISTER VEJVODA REQUESTED THAT I CALL
AT HIS OFFICE FEBRUARY 16 TO FOLLOW UP OUR DISCUSSION OF PREVIOUS
DAY ON DETENTION OF NY TIMES CORRESPONDENT PAUL HOFMANN. WHEN
I SAW VEJVODA, HE LOST LITTLE TIME IN STATING THAT AFTER CONSULTATIONS

WITH GOC "LEADERSHIP," HE HAD BEEN INSTRUCTED TO REJECT EMBASSY
PROTEST OVER TREATMENT OF HOFMANN. VEJVODA REITERATED ESSENTIALS
OF "PRELIMINARY REPORT" (REFTEL) ON HOFMANN'S
ALLEGED REFUSAL TO USE TELEPHONE, TAXICAB, ETC., BUT DID INDICATE
THAT MFA WOULD RECOMMEND EXPEDITIOUS RETURN OF HIS PERSONAL PAPERS.
I REPEATEDLY EXPRESSED DEEP DISAPPOINTMENT OVER THE POSITION GOC
HAS TAKEN ON THIS MATTER AND REMINDED VEJVODA THAT USG ISSUANCE OF
VISAS TO FOREIGN JOURNALISTS IS BASED, BY LAW, ON STRICT RECIPROCITY.
THIS MESSAGE SUGGESTS PROMPT RETALIATORY ACTION BY USG. END SUMMARY.

2. ALMOST IMMEDIATELY AFTER RECEIVING ME, VEJVODA SAID HE
WAS UNDER INSTRUCTION, "AFTER CONSULTATIONS WITH OUR GOVERNMENT
LEADERSHIP" TO REJECT MY PROTEST OF FEBRUARY 15. HE CLAIMED
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HOFMANN HAD NOT BEEN HARASSED. THERE WAS PERHAPS A "MISUNDERSTANDING"

OVER WHAT HAD ACTUALLY TRANSPIRED AT THE CESKE VELENICE RAILWAY
STATION. THE BORDER GUARDS HAD "THE FULL RIGHT" TO CHECK HOFFMAN'S
PAPERS BECAUSE HE HAD BEEN IN CONTACT "WITH CITIZENS AGAINST OUR
SYSTEM." HOFMANN HAD NOT BEEN DETAINED OR ARRESTED; HE HAS SIMPLY
BEEN SEARCHED. BORDER GUARDS HAD OFFERED HOFMANN USE OF A TELEPHONE

TO CALL THE EMBASSY AND HELP IN GETTING A TAXI TO THE NEAREST HOTEL, BUT HOFMANN WAS ANGRY AND REFUSED. VEJVODA THEN UNABASHEDLY SUGGESTED THAT IN ORDER TO PERSUADE US JOURNALISTS TO BE MORE OBJECTIVE ABOUT CZECHOSLOVAK EVENTS IN THE FUTURE, PERHPAS THE EMBASSY COULD CAUTION THEM ON WHAT THEY WRITE AND ON CONTACTS THEY MAKE. WITH RESPECT TO HOFFMANN'S PAPERS, THE FOREIGN MINISTRY WOULD RECOMMEND THEIR PROMPT RETURN AND SPACIL WOULD BE IN TOUCH WITH THE EMBASSY SUBSEQUENTLY ON THIS POINT.

3. VEJVODA ADDED THAT HE WAS "SORRY" ABOUT RECENT BILATERAL STRAINS OVER PRESS QUESTIONS. HE NOTED THAT AMBASSADOR JOHANNES HAD DISCUSSED THESE QUESTIONS IN WASHINGTON WITH DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY ARMITAGE, AND JOHANNES HAD TAKEN SAME APPROACH THERE IN EXPLAINING GOC POSITION (STATE 033548). VEJVODA ALSO RECALLED SPACIL'S STATEMENT TO ME THAT IT HAD NOT BEEN "PROPER" FOR THE DEPARTMENT TO SPEAK OUT ON CZECHOSLOVAK INTERNAL AFFAIRS. VEJVODA STRESSED,MPWEVER, THAT GOC STILL WANTS GOOD RELATIONS WITH US, CONTINUING VISITS BY US JOURNALISTS, AND NO "BRAKE ON THE FORWARD MOVEMENT" OF OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS.

4. I REPLIED THAT I WAS SURE USG WOULD BE DEEPLY DISAPPOINTED OVER THE GOC POSITION JUST STATED BY VEJVODA AND WOULD FIND IT UNACCEPTABLE. I APPRECIATED, HOWEVER, THE RAPID FOLLOW-UP MEETING AFTER YESTERDAY'S PROTEST AND MFA ASSURANCES OF RECOMMENDING RETURN OF THE PAPERS TO HOFMANN--AND I HOPED, TO NBC NEWS CORRESPONDENT COLLITT AS WELL. WITH REGARD TO THE GOC VERSION OF WHAT HAPPENED TO HOFMANN, IT SIMPLY DID NOT ADD UP, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT A 64 YEAR-OLD MAN WOULD WALK AROUND AT NIGHT IN THE SNOW CARRYING HIS LUGGAGE, INSTEAD OF TAKING A TAXI, AND

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WOULD REFUSE HOTEL ACCOMODATIONS. I EMPHASIZED GOC MUST UNDERSTAND THAT TREATMENT OF FOREIGN JOURNALISTS IN US IS BASED ON STRICT RECIPROCITY. RECENT CZECHOSLOVAK ACTIONS MADE MATTERS VERY DIFFICULT FOR USG. FOR ONE THING, WE OBVIOUSLY COULD NOT DICTATE TO OUR JOURNALISTS, AS CZECHS SEEMED TO SUGGEST. WE FURTHER EXPECTED ACCREDITED US JOURNALISTS TO BE ABLE TO CARRY OUT THEIR LEGITIMATE PROFESSIONAL DUTIES, ESPECIALLY IN VIEW OF THE HELSINKI FINAL ACT.

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O 171230Z FEB 77

FM AMEMBASSY PRAGUE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2104

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 PRAGUE 0447

EXDIS

5. VEJVODA REITERATED HIS VIEWPOINT OF PREVIOUS DAY, THAT GOC HOPED US WOULD UNDERSTAND IRRITATION IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA OVER CURRENT WESTERN PRESS ATTACKS. HE ARGUED THAT WESTERN JOURNALISTS FOCUSSED ONLY ON DISSIDENTS AND WERE NOT OBJECTIVE. GOC CONSIDERED REPORTS BY GETLER, COLLITT, AND HOFFMANN HAD

DAMAGED, RATHER THAN IMPROVED, INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING AS CALLED FOR IN THE HELSINKI FINAL ACT. THE SAME WAS TRUE OF THE DEPARTMENT'S JANUARY 26 PRESS STATEMENT, BUT HE DID NOT WANT TO DEBATE SUCH MATTERS. HE WISHED TO CONCENTRATE ON THE HOFMANN CASE AND REPEATED THAT HE HAD BEEN INSTRUCTED TO TAKE THE POSITION HE HAD JUST ARTICULATED. VEJVODA THEN APOLOGIZED FOR CALLING ME IN ON SHORT NOTICE AND TRIED SEVERAL TIMES TO END THE DISCUSSION.

6. I DECIDED, HOWEVER, TO CONTINUE PRESSING THE DEEP CONCERN OF USG OVER PERSISTENT MISTREATMENT OF US JOURNALISTS COMING TO CZECHOSLOVAKIA. I SAW NO EXCUSE FOR DELAYING RETURN OF JOURNALISTS' PAPERS SEIZED BY CZECHOSLOVAK OFFICIALS. I DREW ATTENTION TO THE FACT THAT THIS SITUATION WAS BEING CLOSELY FOLLOWED BY HIGHEST LEVELS OF THE DEPARTMENT AND NOTED PARTICULAR CONCERN IN WASHINGTON THAT ENTIRE HELSINKI FINAL ACT BE IMPLEMENTED--INCLUDING PRINCIPLES 7,

ON HUMAN RIGHTS, AND 10, ON FULFILLING INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS IN GOOD FAITH.

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7. COMMENT: IN WAKE OF REJECTIONS BY VEJVODA AND AMBASSADOR JOHANNES OF OUR PROTESTS CONCERNING THE TREATMENT OF HOFMANN, I BELIEVE GOC SURELY ANTICIPATES SOME FORM OF RETALIATION BY USG. INCIDENTALLY, WE SUSPECT THAT VEJVODA MAY HAVE BEEN REPRIMANDED FOR NOT IMMEDIATELY REJECTING MY FEBRUARY 15 PROTEST AND THAT HE CALLED ME IN ON SUCH SHORT NOTICE IN ORDER TO DELIVER GOC REJECTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

8. ON FURTHER REFLECTION, SINCE TRANSMISSION OF PRAGUE 0411, EMBASSY BELIEVES DEPARTMENT MAY WANT TO CONSIDER: A) ANNOUNCING

TO PRESS CORPS THAT IN OCTOBER 1975 ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARTMAN
HAD INVITED DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER SPACIL TO WASHINGTON
FOR CONSULTATIONS, BUT DUE TO PRESENT BILATERAL STRAINS,
ESPECIALLY THE WELL-KNOWN DIFFICULTIES CURRENTLY
EXPERIENCED BY US JOURNALISTS VISITING CZECHOSLOVAKIA, USG
BELIEVES IT NECESSARY TO POSTPONE THE SPACIL VISIT SINE DIE;
AND (B) MAKING CLEAR TO THE PRESS, AT THE SAME TIME, THAT USG IS
CONTINUING TO CONSIDER "OTHER MEASURES" IN RESPONSE TO
CZECHOSLOVAK HARASSMENT AND DETENTION OF VISITING US CORRESPONDENTS.
WITH REGARD TO "OTHER MEASURES" DEPARTMENT AND OTHER USG AGENCIES
MIGHT SERIOUSLY COONTEMPLA TE MINOR HARASSMENT OF CZECHOSLOVAK
JOURNALISTS, INCLUDING DENIAL OR UNUSUAL DELAY OF VISAS.
ALTHOUGH EMBASSY HAS TO EXPECT THAT RETALIATORY ACTION MAY WELL
INCREASE THE ALREADY SUBSTANTIAL DIFFICULTIES UNDER WHICH WE
FUNCTION HERE, WE RECOMMEND THAT RETALIATORY ACTION BE TAKEN AS
SOON AS POSSIBLE, AFTER GIVING CZECHOSLOVAKS A REASONABLE PERIOD--
PERHAPS A FEW DAYS--TO RETURN HOFMANN'S (AND COLLITT'S)
PAPERS.
BYRNE

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